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DEPT PLEASE PASS TO NEA/I, NEA/ARP FOR BSHUKAN/SWALKER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/23/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR KISL IZ SA

SUBJECT: MAKKAH DECLARATION - WHERE HAVE ALL THE SHI'A GONE?

REF: RIYADH 08254

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Robert Silverman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Iraqi Sunni and Shi'a religious leaders signed on October 20 the "Makkah Declaration," which forbids Sunnis and Shi'a to kill each other (reftel). Many are likening the ten-point declaration to a "fatwa," or religious ruling, although the signatories have not described the document as such. In addition to calling for a "complete end" to sectarian killing, the Declaration also condemns "takfiri" thought and provides that houses of worship are "sacrosanct" -- to include mosques and non-Muslim places of worship. Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Secretary General Akmaluddin Ihsanoglu indicated that a committee would be set up to support the implementation of the Declaration. Governments and religious leaders throughout the region have publicly welcomed the document, including Iran, Jordan, and the Egyptian and Syrian Muftis. The Saudi press reported on October 23 that the OIC plans to follow up on the October 19-20 meetings with a reconciliation conference of Iraqi political leaders sometime during the upcoming Hajj. (NOTE: The Hajj will begin sometime in mid-December. END NOTE.) According to press reports, an unnamed, high-level OIC source said the plan is to convene Iraqi leaders to discuss "all outstanding issues in order to achieve national unity and establish peace and stability in Iraq."

¶2. (C) Although the Saudi public and press generally welcome the Makkah Declaration as a step in the right direction and commend the SAG for its leadership in bringing Iraq's religious leaders to the table, a distinct undercurrent of caution is evident. There has been increasing concern about what is termed as the Grand Ayatollah Sistani's "silence" regarding the Declaration -- despite press reports that he blessed the document. Al-Watan newspaper criticized Sistani in an October 23 article, noting that he did not encourage the pact. Additionally, there have been rumblings that it is unclear whether Moqtada al-Sadr supports the Declaration -- and if so, whom he sent to Makkah as a representative. While the Sunni delegation has been received by the King, the Crown Prince, and, most recently, Minister of Interior Prince Naif, there is has been little information about the activities of the Shi'a representatives -- or even who comprises the delegation and whether they remain in the Kingdom.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Overall, there has been surprisingly little

press relating to the Makkah Conference, and relatively little discussion of the Declaration in the Kingdom to date. To say that the Saudi press and public is optimistic about the document would be a stretch -- especially given the continued violence following its signing. There was little was known about the Iraqi Shi'a delegation, which kept a low profile during its stay in the Kingdom. The lack of knowledge about the Shi'a representatives, including their relative importance in the Iraqi religious community, has resulted in some criticism that the Shi'a have not taken this effort as seriously as the Sunnis. END COMMENT.

OBERWETTER